THE GRAVE

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House appointed for All Living.

A

SERMON.

Preached by the Late Reverend

Mr. THOMAS BOSTON,

Minister of the Gospel at Ettrick.

JOB xxx. 23.

—I know that thou wilt bring me to Death, and to the House appointed for all Living.

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SERMON.

JOB xxx. 23.

For I know that thou wilt bring me to Death, and to the House appointed for all Living.

MAN's life is a short thing, it is not only a vanity, but a short-lived vanity. Consider, First, How the life of man is reckoned in the scripture. It was indeed sometimes reckoned by hundreds of years: but no man ever arrived at a thousand, which yet bears a proportion to eternity. Now, hundreds are brought down to scores; three score and ten, or fourscore, is its utmost length, Psal. xc. 10. But few men arrive at that length of life. Death does but rarely wait till men be bowing down by reason of age, to meet the grave. Yet, as if years were too big a word for such a small thing as the life of man on earth; we find it counted by months, Job xiv. 5. 'The number of his months are with thee.' Our course, like that of the moon, is run in a little time; we are always waxing or waneing, till we disappear. But frequently it is reckoned by days; and these but few, Job xiv. 1. 'Man that is born of a woman, is of few days.' Nay, it is but one day in scripture-account; and that a hireling's day, who will precisely observe when his day ends, and give over his work, ver. 6. 'Till he shall ac-

accompliſh as an hireling his day.' Yea, the ſcripture brings it down to the ſhorteſt ſpace of time, and calls it a moment, 2 Cor. iv. 17. 'Our light affliction (though it laſt all our life long,) is but for a moment.' But elſewhere it is brought down to yet a lower pitch, farther than which one cannot carry it, Pſal. xxxix. 5. 'Mine age is as nothing before thee.' Agreeable to this, Solomon tells us, Eccleſ. iii. 2. 'There is a time to be born, and a time to die:' but makes no mention of a time to live; as if our life were but a ſkip from the womb to the grave. Secondly, Conſider the various ſimilitudes by which the ſcripture repreſents the ſhortneſs of man's life. Hear Hezekiah, Iſa. xxxviii. 12. 'Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a ſhepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life.' The ſhepherd's tent is ſoon removed; for the flocks muſt not feed long in one place: Such is a man's life on this earth, quickly gone. It is a web, he is inceſſantly working; he is not idle ſo much as one moment: in a ſhort time it is wrought, and then it is cut off. Every breathing is a thread in this web, when the laſt breath is drawn, the web is woven out, he expires, and then it is cut off, he breathes no more. Man is like graſs, and like a flower, Iſa. xl. 6. 'All fleſh (even the ſtrongeſt and moſt healthy fleſh,) is graſs, and all the goodlineſs thereof is as the flower of the field.' The graſs is flouriſhing in the morning; but, in the evening, being cut down by the mowers, it is withered: ſo man ſometimes is walking up and down at eaſe in the morning; and in the evening, is lying a corpſe, being knocked down by a ſudden ſtroke, with one or other of death's weapons. The flower, at beſt, is but a weak and tender thing, of ſhort continuance, where-ever it grows: but (obſerve) man is not compared to the flower of the garden; but to the flower of the field, which the foot of every beaſt may tread down at any time. Thus is our life liable to a thouſand accidents every day; any of which may cut us off. But though we ſhould eſcape all theſe, yet at length this graſs withereth, this flower fadeth of itſelf. It is carried off, 'as the cloud is conſumed and vaniſheth away,' Job vii. 9. It looks big as the morning cloud, which promiſeth great things, and raiſeth the expectations of the huſbandman; but the ſun riſeth, and the cloud is ſcattered; death comes, and man evaniſheth. The Apoſtle James propoſeth the queſtion, 'What is your life? chap. iv. 14. Hear his own anſwer, 'It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vaniſheth away.' It is frail, uncertain, and laſteth not. It is as ſmoak, which goes out of the chimney, as if it would darken

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the face of the heavens; but quickly is ſcattered, and appears no more: thus goeth man's life, and where is he? It is a wind, Job vii. 7. 'O remember that my life is wind.' It is but a paſſing blaſt, a ſhort puff, 'a wind that paſſeth away, and cometh not again,' Pſal. lxxviii. 39. Our breath is in our noſtrils, as it were always upon the wing to depart; ever paſſing and repaſſing like a traveller; until it go away for good and all, not to return, till the heavens be no more.

Lastly, Man's life is a ſwift thing; not only a paſſing, but a flying vanity. Have you not obſerved how ſwiftly a ſhadow hath run along the ground, in a cloudy and windy day, ſuddenly darkening the places beautified before with the beams of the ſun, but as ſuddenly diſappearing! Such is the life of man on the earth, for 'he fleeth as a ſhadow, and continueth not,' Job xiv. 2. A weaver's ſhuttle is very ſwift in its motion; in a moment it is thrown from one ſide of the web to the other: yet 'our days are ſwifter than a weaver's ſhuttle,' chap. vii. 6. How quickly is man toſſed through time into eternity! See how Job deſcribes the ſwiftneſs of the time of life, chap. ix. 25. 'Now my days are ſwifter than a poſt: they flee away, they ſee no good,' Ver. 26. 'They are haſted away as the ſwift ſhips; as the eagle that haſteth to the prey.' He compares his days with a poſt; a foot poſt; a runner, who runs ſpeedily to carry tidings, and will make no ſtay. But, though the poſt were like Ahimaaz, who over-ran Cuſhi: our days would be ſwifter than he, for they flee away, like a man fleeing for his life, before the purſuing enemy; he runs with his utmoſt vigour, yet our days run as faſt as he. Howbeit, that is not all. Even he who is fleeing for his life, cannot run always; he muſt needs ſometimes ſtand ſtill, ly down, or run in ſome-where, as Siſera did into Jael's tent, to refreſh himſelf; but our time never halts. Therefore it is compared to ſhips, which can ſail night and day without intermiſſion, till they be at their port; and ſwift ſhips, ſhips of deſire, in which men quickly arrive at the deſired haven; or, ſhips of pleaſure, that ſail more ſwiftly than ſhips of burden. Yet the wind failing, the ſhip's courſe is marred: but our time always runs with a rapid courſe. Therefore it is compared to the eagle flying: not with his ordinary flight, for that is not ſufficient to repreſent the ſwiftneſs of our days; but when he flies upon his prey, which is with an extraordinary ſwiftneſs. And thus, even thus, our days fly away.

Having thus diſcourſed of death, let us improve it, in diſcerning the vanity of the world; in bearing up, with Chriſtian content-

tentment and patience, under all troubles and difficulties in it; in mortifying our lusts; in cleaving unto the Lord with purpose of heart, on all hazards; and in preparing for death's approach.

And, First, Let us hence, as in a looking-glass, behold the vanity of the world; and of all these things in it, which men so much value and esteem, and therefore set their hearts upon. The rich and the poor are equally intent upon this world; they bow the knee to it; yet it is but a clay god: they court the bulky vanity, and run keenly to catch the shadow; the rich man is hugged to death in its embraces; and the poor man wearies himself in the fruitless pursuit. (What wonder if the world's smiles overcome us; when we pursue it so eagerly, even while it frowns upon us!) But look into the grave, O man, consider and be wise; listen to the doctrine of death; and learn, (1.) That hold as fast as thou canst, thou shalt be forced to let go thy hold of the world at length. Though thou load thyself with the fruits of this earth; yet all shall fall off when thou comest to creep into thy hole, the house, under ground, appointed for all living. When death comes, thou must bid an eternal farewell to thy enjoyments in this world: thou must leave thy goods to another: and 'whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?' Luke xii. 20. (2.) Thy portion of these things shall be very little ere long. If thou ly down on the grass, and stretch thyself at full length, and observe the print of thy body when thou risest, thou mayst see how much of this earth will fall to thy share at last. It may be thou shalt get a coffin, and a winding-sheet; but thou art not sure of that: Many who have had abundance of wealth, yet have not had so much when they took up their new house in the land of silence. But however that be, more ye cannot expect. It was a mortifying lesson, Saladine, when dying, gave to his soldiers. He called for his standard-bearer, and ordered him to take his winding-sheet upon his pike, and go out to the camp with it, and tell them, That of all his conquests, victories and triumphs, he had nothing now left him, but that piece of linen to wrap his body in for burial. Lastly, This world is a false friend, who leaves a man in time of greatest need; and flees from him when he has most ado. When thou art lying on a death-bed, all thy friends and relations cannot rescue thee; all thy substance cannot ransom thee, nor procure thee a reprieve for one day; nay, not for one hour. Yea, the more thou possessest of this world's goods, thy sorrow at death is like to be the greater: for tho' one may live more commodiously in a palace, than in a cottage; yet

yet he may die more eaſily in the cottage, where he has very little to make him fond of life.

Secondly, It may ſerve as a ſtore-houſe for Chriſtian contentment and patience under worldly loſſes and croſſes. A cloſe application of the doctrine of death is an excellent remedy againſt fretting; and gives ſome eaſe to a rankled heart. When Job had ſuſtained very great loſſes, he ſat down contented with this meditation. Job i. 21. 'Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked ſhall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, bleſſed be the name of the Lord.' When providence brings a mortality or murrain among your cattle, how ready are you to fret and complain! But the ſerious conſideration of your own death (to which you have a notable help from ſuch providential occurences) may be of uſe to ſilence your complaints, and quiet your rankled ſpirits. Look to the houſe appointed for all living, and learn, (1.) That ye muſt abide a ſorer thruſt, than the loſs of worldly goods. Do not cry out for a thruſt in the leg or arm; for ere long there will be a home-thruſt at the heart. You may loſe your deareſt relations: the wife may loſe her huſband; and the huſband his wife: the parents may loſe their dear children, and the children their parents. But if any of theſe trials happen to you, remember you muſt loſe your own life at laſt; and 'wherefore doth a living man complain?' Lam. iii. 39. It is always profitable to conſider, under affliction, how our caſe might have been worſe than it is. Whatever be conſumed, or taken from us, 'it is of the Lord's mercies that we ourſelves are not conſumed,' ver. 22. (2.) It is but for a ſhort ſpace of time we are to be in this world. It is but little our neceſſities require in this ſhort ſpace of time; when death comes, we will ſtand in need of none of theſe things. Why ſhould men rack their heads with cares how to provide for to-morrow; while they know not if they ſhall need any thing to-morrow? Tho' a man's proviſion for his journey, be near ſpent, he is not diſquieted, if he think he is near home: are you working with candle light, and is there little of your candle left? It may be there is as little ſand in your glaſs? and if ſo, ye have little ado for it. (3.) Ye have matters of greater weight that challenge your care. Death's at the door, beware you loſe not your ſouls. If blood break out at one part of the body, they uſe to open a vein in another part of it, to turn the ſtream of blood; and ſo to ſtop it. Thus the Spirit of God ſometimes cures men of ſorrow for earthly things; by opening the heart-vein to bleed for ſin. Did we purſue heavenly things

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the more vigorouſly that our affairs in this life proſper not, we ſhould thereby gain a double advantage: our worldly ſorrow would be diverted, and our beſt treaſure increaſed. (4.) Croſſes of this nature will not laſt long. The world's ſmiles and frowns will be quickly buried together in everlaſting forgetfulneſs. Its ſmiles go away as the foam on the water: and its frowns are as a paſſing ſtitch in a man's ſide. Time flies away with ſwift wings, and carries our earthly comforts, and croſſes too, along with it: neither of them will accompany us into the houſe appointed for all living, Job iii. 17. 'There the wicked ceaſe from troubling, and there the weary be at reſt,' Ver. 18. 'There the priſoners reſt together, they hear not the voice of the oppreſſor.' Ver. 19. 'The ſmall and great are there, and the ſervant is free from his maſter,' Caſt your eyes on eternity, and ye will ſee, affliction here is but for a moment. The truth is, our time is ſo very ſhort, that it will not allow either our joys, or griefs to come to perfection. Wherefore, let them that 'weep, be as tho' they weeped not; and they that rejoice, as tho' they rejoiced not,' &c. 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30, 31. (5.) Death will put all men on a level. The king and the beggar muſt dwell in one houſe, when they come to their journey's end; tho' their entertainment by the way be very different. 'The ſmall and the great are there,' Job iii. 19. We are in this world as on a ſtage: it is no great matter, whether a man act the part of a prince or a peaſant; for when they have acted their parts, they muſt both get behind the curtain, and appear no more. Laſtly, If thou be not in Chriſt, whatever thy afflictions now be, troubles, a thouſand times worſe, are abiding thee in another world. Death will turn thy croſſes into pure unmixed curſes: and then how gladly wouldſt thou return to thy former afflicted ſtate, and purchaſe it at any rate; were there any poſſibility of ſuch a return. If thou be in Chriſt, thou mayſt well bear thy croſs. Death will put an end to all thy troubles. If a man on a journey be not well accomodate, where he lodgeth only for a night, he will not trouble himſelf much about the matter: becauſe he is not to ſtay there; it is not his home. Ye are on the road to eternity; let it not diſquiet you, that you meet with ſome hardſhips in the inn of this world. Fret not, becauſe it is not ſo well with you as with ſome others. One man travels with a cane in his hand; his fellow-traveller (perhaps) has but a common ſtick, or ſtaff: either of them will ſerve the turn. It is no great matter which of them be yours; both will be laid aſide when you come to your journey's end.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, It may ſerve for a bridle, to curb all manner of luſts, particularly thoſe converſant about the body. A ſerious viſit made to cold death, and that ſolitary manſion, the grave, might be of good uſe to repreſs them.

1ſt, It may be of uſe to cauſe men remit of their inordinate care for the body; which is to many the bane of their ſouls. Often do theſe queſtions, 'What ſhall we eat? What ſhall we drink? And wherewithal ſhall we be clothed?' leave no room for another of more importance, viz. 'Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord?' The ſoul is put to the rack, to anſwer theſe mean queſtions, in favour of the body; while its own eternal intereſts are neglected. But ah! why are men ſo buſy to repair the ruinous cottage, leaving the inhabitant to bleed to death of his wounds, unheeded, unregarded? Why ſo much care for the body, to the neglecting of the concerns of the immortal ſoul? O! be not ſo anxious for what can only ſerve your bodies; ſince ere long, the clods of cold earth will ſerve for back and belly too.

2dly, It may abate your pride on account of bodily endowments, which vain man is apt to glory in. Value not yourſelves on the bloſſom of youth; for while ye are in your blooming years, ye are but ripening for a grave: and death gives the fatal ſtroke, without aſking any body's age. Glory not in your ſtrength, it will quickly be gone: the time will ſoon be, when you ſhall not be able to turn yourſelves on a bed; and you muſt be carried by your grieving friends to your long home. And what ſignifies your healthful conſtitution? Death does not always enter in ſooneſt where it begins ſooneſt to knock at the door; but makes as great diſpatch with ſome in a few hours, as with others in many years. Value not yourſelves on your beauty, which 'ſhall conſume in the grave,' Pſal. xlix. 14. Remember the change death makes on the faireſt face, Job xiv. 20. 'Thou changeſt his countenance, and ſendeth him away.' Death makes the greateſt beauty ſo loathſome, that it muſt be buried out of ſight. Could a looking-glaſs be uſed in the houſe appointed for all living; it would be a terror to theſe, who now look oftner into their glaſſes than into their Bibles. And what though the body be gorgeouſly arrayed? The fineſt clothes are but badges of our ſin and ſhame; and, in a little will be exchanged for a winding-ſheet; when the body will become a feaſt to the worms.

3dly, It may be a mighty check upon ſenſuality and fleſhly luſts, 1 Pet. ii. 11. 'I beſeech you, as ſtrangers and pilgrims, ab-

abſtain from fleſhly luſts, which war againſt the ſoul.' It is hard to cauſe wet wood take fire: and when the fire doth take hold of it, it is ſoon extinguiſhed. Senſuality makes men moſt unfit for divine communications, and is an effectual means to quench the Spirit. Intemperance in eating and drinking carries on the ruin of ſoul and body at once; and haſtens death, while it makes the man moſt unmeet for it. Therefore, 'take heed to yourſelves, leſt at any time your hearts be overcharged with ſurfeiting and drunkenneſs, and ſo that day come upon you unawares,' Luke xxvi. 34. But O, how often is the ſoul ſtruck through with a dart, in gratifying the ſenſes! At theſe doors deſtruction enters in. Therefore 'Job made a covenant with his eyes,' chap. xxxi. 1. 'The mouth of a ſtrange woman is a deep pit; he that is abhorred of the Lord ſhall fall therein,' Prov. xxii. 14. 'Let him that ſtandeth take heed leſt he fall.' Beware of laſciviouſneſs; ſtudy modeſty in your apparel, words and actions. The ravens of the valley of death will at length pick out the wanton eye: The obſcene filthy tongue will at length be quiet, in the land of ſilence: and grim death embracing the body in its cold arms, will effectually allay the heat of all fleſhly luſts.

Lastly, In a word, it may check our earthly mindedneſs; and at once knock down the luſt of the fleſh, the luſt of the eyes, and the pride of life. Ah! if we muſt die, why are we thus? Why ſo fond of temporal things: ſo anxious to get them, ſo eager in the embraces of them, ſo mightily touched with the loſs of them? Let me, upon a view of the houſe appointed for all living, beſpeake the worldling in the words of Solomon, Prov. xxiii. 5. 'Wilt thou ſet thine eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themſelves wings, they flee away as an eagle towards heaven.' Riches and all worldly things are but a fair nothing: they are that which is not. They are not what they ſeem to be: they are all but gilded vanities, that deceive the eye. Comparatively they are not: there is infinitely more of nothingneſs and not being, than of being and reality in the beſt of them. What is the world, and all that is in it, but a faſhion, or fair ſhow, ſuch as men make on a ſtage, a paſſing ſhow? 1 Cor. vii. 31. Royal pomp is but a gaudy ſhow, or appearance in God's account, Acts xxv. 23. The beſt name they get is good things; but, obſerve it, they are only the wicked man's good things, Luke xvi. 25. 'Thou in thy life-time receiveſt thy good things,' ſays Abraham in the parable to the rich man in hell. And well may the men of the world

call

call theſe things their goods: for there is no other good in them, about them, nor attending them. Now wilt thou ſet thine eyes upon empty ſhows and fancies? Wilt thou 'cauſe thine eyes to fly on them,' as the word is? Shall mens hearts fly out at their eyes upon them, as a ravenous bird on its prey? If they do, let them know, that, at length theſe ſhall fly as faſt away from them, as ever their eyes flew upon them: like a flock of fair feathered birds, that ſettle on a fool's ground; the which, when he runs to catch them as his own, do immediately take wing, fly away, and, ſitting down on his neighbour's ground, elude his expectation, Luke xii. 20. 'Thou fool, this night thy ſoul ſhall be required of thee: then whoſe ſhall theſe things be?' Tho' you do not make wings to them, as many do; they make themſelves wings, and fly away; not as a tame houſe-bird, which may be catched again: nor as an hawk, that will ſhow where ſhe is by her bells, and be called again with the lure: but as an eagle, which quickly flies out of ſight, and cannot be recalled. Forbear thou to behold theſe things, O mortal! there is no reaſon, thou ſhouldſt ſet thine eyes upon them. This world is a great inn, in the road to eternity, to which thou art travelling. Thou art attended by theſe things, as ſervants belonging to the inn, where thou lodgeſt, they wait upon thee, while thou art there; and when thou goeſt away, they will convoy thee to the door. But they are not thine, they will not go away with thee; but return to wait on other ſtrangers as they did on thee.

Fifthly, It may ſerve as a ſpring of Chriſtian reſolution, to cleave to Chriſt, adhere to his truths, and continue in his ways, whatever he may ſuffer for ſo doing. It would much allay the fear of man, that bringeth a ſnare. 'Who art thou, that thou ſhouldſt be afraid of a man that ſhall die?' Iſa. li. 12. Look on perſecutors as pieces of brittle clay, that ſhall be daſhed to pieces: for then ſhall ye deſpiſe them as foes, that are mortal; whoſe terrors to others in the land of the living, ſhall quickly die with themſelves. The ſerious conſideration of the ſhortneſs of our time, and the certainty of death, will teach us, that all the advantage we can make by our apoſtacy, in time of trial, is not worth the while: it is not worth going out of the way to get it: and what we refuſe to forego for Chriſt's ſake, may quickly be taken from us by death. But, we can never loſe it ſo honourably, as for the cauſe of Chriſt and his goſpel: for, what glory is it, that ye give up what ye have in the world, when God takes it away from you by death, whether you will or not? This conſiderarion may teach us to undervalue life itſelf.

ſelf, and chuſe to forego it, rather than to ſin. The worſt that men can do, is to take away that life, which we cannot long keep, tho' all the world ſhould conſpire to help us to retain the Spirit. And if we refuſe to offer it up to God, when he calls for it in defence of his honour, he can take it from us another way, as it fared with him, who could not burn for Chriſt, but was afterwards burnt by an accidental fire in his houſe.

Laſtly, It may ſerve for a ſpur, to incite us to prepare for death. Conſider, (1.) Your eternal ſtate will be according to the ſtate in which you die: death will open the doors of heaven or hell to you. As the tree falls, ſo it ſhall ly thro' eternity. If the infant be dead-born, the whole world will not raiſe it to life again: and if one die out of Chriſt, in an unregenerate ſtate, there is no more hope of him for ever. (2.) Seriouſly conſider what it is to go into another world: a world of ſpirits, where-with we are very little acquainted. How frightful is converſe with ſpirits, to poor mortals, in this life! and, how dreadful is the caſe, when men are hurried away into another world, not knowing but devils may be their companions for ever! let us then give all diligence to make, and advance, our acquaintance with the Lord of that world. (3.) It is but a ſhort time we have to prepare for death, therefore, now or never: ſeeing the time aſſigned for preparation will ſoon be over. Eccleſ. ix. 10. 'Whatſoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might: for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wiſdom in the grave, whither thou goeſt.' How can we be idle, having ſo great a work to do, and ſo little time to do it in? But if the time be ſhort, the work of preparation for death, though hard work, will not laſt long. The ſhadows of the evening make the labourer work chearfully, knowing the time to be at hand, when he ſhall be called in from his labour. (4.) Much of our ſhort time is over already: and the youngeſt of us all cannot aſſure himſelf, that there is as much of his time to come, as is paſt. Our life in the world is but a ſhort preface to long eternity: and much of the tale is told. Oh! ſhall we not double our diligence, when ſo much of our time is ſpent, and ſo little of our great work is done? (5.) The preſent time is flying away: and we cannot bring back time paſt, it hath taken an eternal farewel of us: there is no kindling the fire again that is burnt to aſhes. The time to come is not ours; and we have no aſſurance of a ſhare in it, when it comes. We have nothing we can call ours, but the preſent moment: and that is flying away! how ſoon our time may be at an end we know not.

Die

Die we muſt, but who can tell us, when? If death kept one ſet time for all, we were in no hazard of a ſurpriſe: but daily obſervation ſhews us, there is no ſuch thing. Now the flying ſhadow of our life allows no time for loitering. The rivers run ſpeedily into the ſea from whence they came; but not ſo ſpeedily as man to the duſt from whence he came. The ſtream of time is the ſwifteſt current, and quickly runs out to eternity. Laſtly, If once death carry us off, there is no coming back again to mend our matters, Job xiv. 14. 'If a man die, ſhall he live again?' Dying is a thing we cannot get a trial of; it is what we can do only once, Heb. ix. 27. 'It is appointed unto men once to die. And that which can be but once done, and yet is of ſo much importance, that our all depends on having it done right; we have need to uſe the utmoſt diligence, that we may do it well. Therefore prepare for death, and do it timeouſly.

If ye, who are unregenerate, aſk me, what ye ſhall do, to prepare for death, that ye may die ſafely? I anſwer, I have told you already, what muſt be done. And that is, your nature and ſtate muſt be changed: ye muſt be born again, ye muſt be united to Jeſus Chriſt by faith. And till this is done, ye are not capable of other directions, which belong to one's dying comfortably. Amen.

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